

19 April 1984

MEMORANDUM FOR:

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FROM: Herbert E. Meyer, Vice Chairman
National Intelligence Council

SUBJECT: What Might the Soviets Do?

I take the liberty of passing along these post-luncheon thoughts, in hopes they will prove useful for your upcoming conversation on this subject:

1. When we accumulate a range of possibilities, we may find that they fit into three distinct categories:

-- Soviet actions to raise tensions. In this category I would include all seemingly random incidents--the shoot-down of an airliner, the burning of an embassy, the taking of US hostages, the surfacing of a Soviet sub underneath a US aircraft carrier, something or other in Berlin--that together will serve to generate fear and even alarm. A steady barrage of propaganda would raise the decibel level of background noise, which in turn would be amplified by elements of the US media.

-- Soviet actions to raise the specter of a nuclear confrontation. In this category I would include such developments as the introduction of nuclear weapons to Cuba and/or the Caribbean, or the overt targeting of US allies such as the Philippines.

-- Soviet actions designed to force the commitment of US troops under circumstances the American public would not easily comprehend or support. In this category I would worry about a Communist offensive designed to bring about the immediate collapse of the El Salvador government, of a Persian Gulf regime, or a vulnerable US ally such as the Philippines or perhaps Jordan.

No doubt this list is incomplete, and further reflection may eliminate some possibilities and even shift around the categories. But this is the sort of analytic approach we need to take.

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2. Even if we do launch an effort along the lines we discussed, several things need to be done immediately:

-- The possibility of Soviet or Soviet-inspired trouble-making needs to be anticipated publicly, which in turn would deflate its impact. This harks back to my own earlier memo, and as you recall I did what I could to launch such an effort last summer--prior to the shoot-down of KAL 007

Now the point needs to be made by heavy hitters, whose views

would command attention. In essence the point that needs to be made is this: The US has begun to stand up for its own interests and to defend itself prudently. We never expected the Soviets to like it, and they don't. They're the sort of people who would lash out in an effort to scare us off course, and we should be prepared for some nastiness. We are prepared, and should the Soviets in fact lash out we will deal with them prudently but firmly.

What would be most damaging during the coming months would be an air of crisis, accompanied by pictures of grim-looking US leaders interrupting schedules to meet at odd hours. By publicly anticipating this sort of thing, when the Soviets do act we are in a position to say: Well, as you know we've been expecting something like this. We'll deal with it, of course. But there's no reason for alarm at all. Indeed, it just shows we're on the right track.

-- Senior US officials need to recognize--now--that the sorts of Soviet actions we are talking about, if they come, would be designed explicitly to destroy the Reagan-Bush Administration. Since the Soviet action would have an objective that is more political than strategic, so too must our response be more political than strategic. There will be no time to think this through once trouble strikes. Moreover, the national security machinery does not think this way, and therefore will generate a series of options not suited to countering the Soviet objective. Thus the need for a recognition--now--that the sort of trouble we are anticipating will need to be dealt with a bit differently, so that the options for response are designed explicitly to block the Soviet objective.

3. Our list of possibilities should include a run-down of indicators and some estimates of warning-times.

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Herbert E. Meyer

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